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BLUFFDALE

FROM THE ILLINOIS MONTHLY MAGAZINE, FEBRUARY, 1832.

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"Ever charming, ever new,
When will the prairie tire my view?
Or craggy bluff so wild and high,
Rudely rushing on the sky?"

The settlement of Bluffdale, in Greene County, Illinois, presents, more than any other place I have yet seen, a union of all that is peculiar and striking in the Western landscape. A description of its scenery has appeared in some of our papers, but it would not be improper to give, in your interesting work, additional sketches of that interesting spot.

Almost hanging over the houses of this little settlement are the bluffs, in many places a solid perpendicular wall of calcareous rock, rising to the height of two hundred feet. Immediately back of this wall, and not infrequently commencing at its very edge, rises a chain of hills, in the shape of cones, from one to two hundred feet still higher. The bluffs are occasionally broken by ravines which afford an easy ascent to the highlands. In the warm season of the year, these beautiful cones are covered to their summits with the richest verdure, presenting a fine relief to the sterile brownness of the cliffs below.

From the bluffs, but more especially from the hills behind them, the prospect is beautiful, beyond the powers of the most vivid imagination to picture. Standing at an elevation of three or four hundred feet above the surrounding country, the eye ranges over an almost boundless prospect. The immense prairie on the west, without a single tree, or even shrub, to intercept the view—level as a floor—covered with luxuriant grass, intermingled with flowers of every hue; the Illinois

River winding for miles along its western border, and appearing in the distance no wider than a ribbon; the blue hills beyond, almost faded into the haze of distance; the lakes, upon whose transparent bosom thousands of every variety of water fowl are sporting in all the happiness of fearless nature; the innumerable cattle sprinkled over this rich pasture, far as the eye can see, and generally disposed in groups—all this presents a tout ensemble which the most careless observer cannot see with indifference.

The plantations of this settlement commence at the very foot of the bluffs and skirt the prairie. So small are they in comparison with the wide unreclaimed tract that stretches beyond them, that the primeval solitude of nature seems scarcely interrupted. From the heights, herds of deer are often seen peacefully grazing with the domestic cattle that have intruded on their domain. Large springs of the purest water gush from the rocks and wind along the prairie till they become absorbed in the loamy soil. It hardly requires the aid of a "poetical temperament" to fancy, while the moon is beaming in her brightness on their meandering stream, that some gentle Naiad, from the classic vale of Tempe presides over these silent fountains.

In the early settlement of that place, many, who esteemed themselves wise in such matters, predicted that Bluffdale would soon become the grave-yard of its settlers. Their prediction was grounded on very sage and very learned theories of "Miasmata." A medical professor of much celebrity, who visited the spot, could discover nothing there to generate disease, beyond what is found elsewhere. Unfortunately for these croakers, experience has fully demonstrated to all whom regret and envy do not render insensible to proof, that no part of the State is less subject to fatal disorders; and the enormous advance of a thousand percent on the first cost, has been offered for some lands in Bluffdale. Such is the nature of the soil that rains, however copious, are quickly absorbed; consequently the roads are always free from mud, and the prairies from putrescent waters. Nothing can be more pure and limpid

than the cold springs that gush from the bluffs. The rank vegetation is never suffered to undergo decomposition, and load the air with disease. The grass has hardly ceased to vegetate, before it is consumed by the devouring flames. Miles of prairie are seen on fire at once, and, especially when viewed from the heights, forcibly calls to mind the conflagration of all things.

On the highest of the bluffs, and on the cones beyond, which resemble the common Indian mounds in every thing but their immense size, are the graves of a race who once peopled this interesting spot, but whose very name has ages since gone to oblivion. The coffins are about three feet in length, composed of flat stones. Once the human forms that quietly repose in these rude sepulchres, were animated—their hearts beat high with joy and hope. How little did they dream while dancing by moonlight on the smooth grass, or listening to tales of war and love, under the shade of the oaks that spread their giant arms over the pebbly springs, that the smoke of their wigwams would cease to curl around the craggy bluffs—the white man occupy their lovely retreat—his cattle low on the prairie where they were wont to chase the buffalo and the deer—and their deeds of renown be forgotten forever.

At the foot of the same bluff is the grave-yard of the present inhabitants, where many tears have fallen. What a striking contrast, this stupendous wall of rock, coeval with the world, and scoffing at the flight of years, presents to the remains of man that moulder around it.

There is a lonely, solitary grandeur, in the view from the bluffs that induces contemplation; and during a residence in that settlement, I frequently remarked the deep influence which the surrounding scenery exerted upon the tone of feeling of the inhabitants. Isolated by nature from the rest of the world, they rarely look for society beyond the walls that bound them; and I found there, as much at least, of that touching interest in each other's happiness, enjoined by Christian volume, as I have ever seen elsewhere.

Near the middle of the settlement, built by the joint labors of all, is their plain but commodious school house, where every child; old enough, is taught. A Sunday school has been taught there during the last seven years, and it was the happiness of the writer of this article to aid in conducting it the first season of its establishment. It was an interesting sight to see the groups of rosy little girls and boys, on a bright Sunday morning, pouring in from among the hills and from the prairie, dressed in their best attire, "clean as silver," their faces beaming with joy at the return of that happy day. Their parents often accompanied them and it was gratifying to observe the honest pride that sparkled in the eyes of the mothers on hearing the well-recited lessons of their children. The first time these scholars were presented with the reward books earned by study and good conduct, it was interesting to witness the pleasure and thankfulness expressed in every look. They could hardly realize that they were so rich—that the books were their "very own," as they expressed it; and they returned home with eager steps to show their treasures. These children were the offspring of parents who supported themselves by labor, and to whom the value of a book was not trifling. Could some of our countrymen who have so liberally aided Sunday schools and Bible societies, have listened, as I have, while the superintendent was telling these scholars what benevolent men have done for them, and seen tears of gratitude glistening in the eyes of sixty scholars, of a remote and secluded settlement, they would have felt paid for some share of their toils and donations.

This settlement was commenced in the year 1821, when the land was first exposed to sale by the United States. Captain Gideon Spencer, an officer in the late war, is considered the patriarch and pioneer of that settlement. In 1820, accompanied by several others, he ascended the Illinois River, from Missouri, where he then resided and explored the country on both sides to a great distance. The place since called Bluffdale received the preference. A few individuals resided there on the unsurveyed land, but the principal inhabitants were In-

dians. Here was their Paradise; game and fish were plenty; and here, too, was freedom from care, ignorance of all the ills of wealth and ambition. Their houses were of an oval shape, covered with mats of tall prairie grass and were placed so as to form a half circle. They formed a village of about ninety houses. Soon after the sale of the land in 1821, they disappeared, manifesting the deepest regret on leaving the spot on which they had been born, which was associated with so many tender recollections.

Among the most beautiful farms of Bluffdale are those of Captain Spencer, selected by him before any purchase had been made, and of Mr. Rodgers. Infant vineyards and large orchards of every variety of fruit congenial with the climate, are now seen on those two farms, so recently in a state of nature. Much attention is paid to improvements in agriculture, and the silk worm has been extensively reared by one family for the last three years.

From the richness of the soil, its springs, boundless pasturage, its excellent quarries of building and fencing stone, and its proximity to the Illinois River, it must unavoidably become a place of wealth. It is distant from St. Louis about eighty miles by the river. Steamboats have arrived there almost daily during the past season. A postoffice is established there, from which more than fifty newspapers and other periodicals are distributed weekly to the citizens of that little settlement. Among the number are six of your Illinois Monthly Magazine.

I have seen no other place that united so many desirable qualities as Bluffdale.

“And I said if there’s peace to be found in the world,
The heart that is humble might hope for it here.”

Bluffdale.